

REFLECTIONS by the First President of The Jamaican Canadian Association

by Roy Williams ✓

It was the Spring and early Summer of 1962. Much was being said and done in Jamaica regarding the imminent emancipation of Jamaica from colonial status to join the growing ranks of independent nations. Jamaicans all over the world were elated at the prospects of independence and self-government.

In Toronto, in those days, there was only a handful of Jamaicans. Not many of us knew each other. We were very few and far between. We were a scattered band of rugged pioneers comprised of nurses responding to the shortage of nurses in Canada; students attending university; some household workers; and a few others who were brave enough to find themselves in Canada by various means.

There was no organization of Jamaicans — no clubs, no churches, no common meeting ground. Few Jamaicans owned their own homes then. We were really a part of nothing and needed to have an identity and to become a part of something.

The Jamaican Independence was the catalyst that enabled Jamaicans to come together to celebrate something significant in their history and to retain the structure for their future identification and well being.

One man made it all possible — Edmund S. Ricketts, an ageless veteran of many wars who tried to teach music to every black child (or adult) in the city. He played in every army band that marched, paraded or played anywhere in the city. He could be seen in every Santa Claus, Grey Cup and other parades playing his clarinet and marching like a man 40 years younger.

Ricketts was the man who walked the streets of Toronto (he always walked) and contacted every person whom he believed to be a Jamaican and invited them to meetings which were held in people's houses and apartments. He helped generate the enthusiasm for the celebration of the Jamaican Independence and for the creation of a permanent organization of Jamaicans following the event.

Some of the people whom Ricketts brought together for those initial meetings are: Vi Carter, Bromley Armstrong, Amy Nelson, Mavis Magnus, George King, Ira Dundas, Daphney White, Byron Carter, and Vi King. There were others because the numbers kept increasing as Ricketts continued his relentless recruiting. Some of the above were on the first Executive Committee of the newly-emerging Jamaican-Canadian Association.

The association has grown in power, influence and numbers to become one of the premiere organizations in this multicultural society. The road has not been an easy one. There have been pitfalls and traps. There have been skeptics and detractors. There have been those who would undermine or destroy the organization. However, it has survived these 21 years and its prospects have never been better. It can and will move on from strength to greater strength. It will accomplish the purposes for which it was founded.

This, then, is a tribute to the energy, dedication, enthusiasm, selflessness and vision of the late Edmund S. Ricketts who worked so tirelessly to translate a dream into a reality.



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